



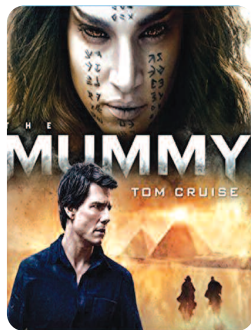
# QUEUED UP

BY BRYAN REESMAN

## THE MUMMY (2017)

**The set-up:** An American military strike in Iraq reveals the hidden tomb of an ancient Egyptian princess named Ahmanet, who was mummified alive for her crimes in an underground prison. Soon archaeologist Jennifer Halsey (Annabelle Wallis) and Sergeant "liberator of antiquities" Nick Morton (Tom Cruise) find themselves caught up in a supernatural maelstrom once her spirit breaks free. Ahmanet wants to possess Nick, while a British government agency run by Dr. Henry Jekyll (Russell Crowe) seeks to stop her (and

other supernatural beings like her). But Jekyll has his own twisted agenda that could endanger Nick and others. **The breakdown:** Playing off elements from both the original movie and the high octane 1999 reboot starring Brendan Fraser, this new incarnation flips the script with a female mummy that has a more tragic backstory. But despite the star power involved, even some impressive cinematography and dazzling effects, *The Mummy* unravels fast. It suffers from modern blockbuster maladies, particularly an unnecessarily



dizzying pace and underdeveloped characters. Fans of *An American Werewolf in London* will likely be more irked than tickled that a plot device is lifted for lesser use here. This is a very shaky start to Universal's Dark Universe franchise.

## HOPSCOTCH (1980)

**The set-up:** After a senior CIA operative (Walter Matthau) finds himself being shoved out of the way by a younger, by the book superior (Ned Beatty), he quits the agency, absconds to Europe with top secret files, and starts writing his highly revelatory memoirs, sending chapter by chapter to intelligence agencies around the world. Naturally, the CIA and their likeminded counterparts including the KGB start hunting for him, fearful of his book's impending

publication and the damage it could do to all of them. **The breakdown:** If *Hopscotch* were made today, it would be directed as a fast-paced, paranoid, tautly-wound political thriller. But under the auspices of director Ronald Neame working from Bryan Forbes and Brian Garfield's screenplay, this Cold War farce is a tale of cat and mouse that adds intrigue and a touch of danger as Matthau's rogue operative gives his old boss a taste of his own

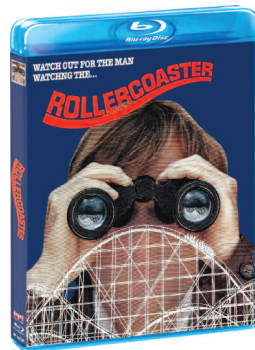


emasculat[i]on, often set to the sounds of Mozart. It's a refreshingly lighthearted take on a macho genre that wonderfully satirizes the spy game.

## ROLLERCOASTER (1977)

**The set-up:** A psychopath (Timothy Bottoms) who likes to create rollercoaster accidents does just that in order to blackmail five owners of major American amusement parks to fork over one million dollars in cash or suffer increased calamities. Incensed by the carnage on rides he visits, a safety inspector (George Segal) takes it upon himself to hunt down the suspect while also working, somewhat tensely, with an FBI agent

(Richard Widmark) and his men. But the criminal is craftier than they think, and attempts to catch him could prove to be fatal for unsuspecting park-goers. **The breakdown:** Shot in "Sensurround" to heighten the roller-cam photography (it won't work on your HD TV), this '70s disaster thriller is more notable for that gimmick and its casting — small parts for a teen Helen Hunt, veteran thespian Henry Fonda, the rock band Sparks,



and an uncredited walk-on from Steve Guttenberg — than its story. But it's still charming nostalgia for moviegoers who grew up in that innocent era.

## WONDER WOMAN (2017)

**The set-up:** After her people's once isolated island sanctuary is beset by German invaders during WWI, Amazonian Princess Diana of Themyscira (Gal Gadot) journeys with American Major Steve Rogers (Chris Pine) to England to help end the War To End All Wars. But the outside world proves to be more dangerous and chaotic than she imagined. Combining her fierce Amazonian warrior training with a compassionate heart, Diana sets to rebalance the world and be the hero it needs in a time of despair.

**The breakdown:** Finally, a new DC Comics movie gets done right. Director Patty Jenkins and writer Allan Heinberg siphon some of the tongue-in-cheek approach from the Richard Donner/Christopher Reeve interpretation of Superman, here presenting Diana/Wonder Woman as a regal yet naive hero who is thrown into a war torn Europe staunchly ruled by an unempathetic patriarchal order that is an anathema to her worldview. Gal Gadot has athleticism and charisma to spare and plays well off potential



paramour Chris Pine. While it definitely has the obligatory over-the-top finale that all superhero movies require today, *Wonder Woman* is a fun, smart ride and a worthy big screen debut for its 76-year-old icon. The home video release includes a new scene and two hours of bonus features.

## THE GHOUL (2016)

**The set-up:** In order to track down an alleged killer and get inside his head, a British cop (Tom Meeten) goes undercover as a patient of the suspect's psychotherapist and uses bits of his own life as fodder for the sessions. But as the "work" continues and he forms a bond with the odd suspect, the line between fiction and reality blurs, with the cop looking more like a mentally ill patient fantasizing about a police investigation rather than living it. Which is the true story?

**The breakdown:** What gives *The Ghoul* a different flavor

from other psychological thrillers is how it focuses on characters in intimate settings and eschews the gratuitous chase or siege sequences and trite mental games of like minded fare. For his indie film, Gareth Tunley enlisted the aid of many fellow comedians to craft this deliriously dark drama. Talk about stretching yourself. Puzzling and cryptic, *The Ghoul* twists and turns into a cinematic mind-fuck that will likely require more than one viewing to sort out. In his liner notes, Adam Scovell asserts that this is a film that is more about the

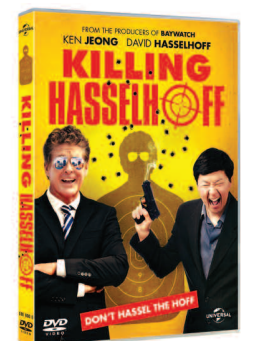


psychic underbelly of London, a city whose foundations harbor a dark past and have been built on arcane magic and esoterica. Whether you glean that or not, the film's hazy spell will at least jog your brain cells and inspire philosophical debate.

## KILLING HASSELHOFF (2017)

**The set-up:** A club owner named Chris (Ken Jeong) has been part of an annual celebrity death pool, and his pick is David Hasselhoff, who actually blows him off when he throws an afterparty after a big event. The afterparty ends in scandal and financial loss for Chris. Angry and now in the hole to a mobster for \$200,000, he decides to assassinate The Hoff himself to collect his death pool money, but he soon finds the task much harder than he anticipated. With the clock ticking on his mafia

debt, Chris needs to complete his task soon to save his skin. **The breakdown:** Hasselhoff has quietly re-emerged through the fourth *Sharknado* flick and recent cameos in the *Baywatch* movie and *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2*. His part here is substantially larger and hammier, with the actor amiably sending up his onscreen roles, demeanor, and gracefully aging visage. Jon Lovitz plays the agent who suffers through his delusions, and Jeong, who made his name in the *Hangover* franchise,



enlivens his lead role with manic energy. While this low budget comedy is funnier than it should be, it's not funny enough, often resorting to sophomoric humor when it could have bumped things up a notch or two.

## AMERICAN FABLE (2017)

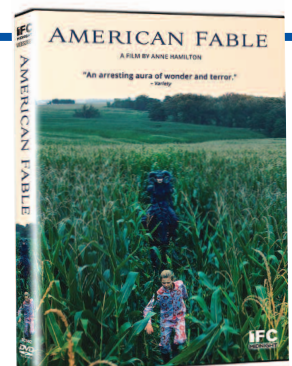
In this dreamlike heartland drama, 11-year-old Gitty (Peyton Kennedy) discovers an older man (Richard Schiff) named Jonathan trapped inside an abandoned silo on her family's expansive

property. He says if she can get him out he has the power to grant her wishes. But she becomes disturbed when she sees Jonathan's kidnapping relayed on the news, and she realizes that her farming family,

who have fallen on hard times, may secretly be imprisoning him for money at the behest of a mysterious (and possibly darkly magical) stranger. Now Gitty is caught between right and wrong, wanting to stay

loyal to her loving parents but also unnerved by the events and by the violent tendencies displayed her older, bullying brother. Anne Hamilton's film does not wrap everything up in a nice, neat bow nor cater to a black and white sense of morality. Its Reagan-era

parable about desperation, greed, and the consequences of giving into both strikes a strong chord, particularly as told through the perspective of an innocent girl awakening to darkness in the world. *American Fable* is a notable directorial debut.



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